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INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 6314
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1712
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1888
RHMFISS/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RHRMDAB/COMUSNAVCENT
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/TIA/ITA, DS/IP/SPC/SO, AF/E,
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2035
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [ER](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: REPORTS OF OPPOSITION ATTACKS AND BORDER SKIRMISH
WITH ETHIOPIA

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (SBU) Eritrean rebel groups claimed to have killed 25 Eritrean soldiers and wounded another 38 in two separate attacks in south-central Eritrea, according to January 2nd media reports. The Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) and the Eritrean Salvation Front (ESF), Ethiopian-backed armed opposition groups, said their fighters attacked military bases near Kokobay and Kermeti. Meanwhile, the Eritrean Ministry of Information reported that 10 "TPLF soldiers" were killed and two captured January 1st when they attacked Eritrean forces north of the Ethiopian border town of Zalambesa. The Eritreans claimed to have recovered six AK-47 rifles, a machinegun, and communications equipment. (Comment: It is probable that these reports refer to the same incidents).

¶2. (S/NF) RSO met with a reliable Western diplomat who stated their embassy had spoken with the Director of Eritrean military intelligence on 01/04/10. NOTE: According to this source the military intelligence director has provided reliable information in the past. END NOTE. The director stated that Ethiopian forces deliberately attacked Eritrean forces, but that they had repulsed the attack. The attack was neither started by miscommunications nor by soldiers firing their rifles into the air to celebrate the new year. The director did not say how long the skirmish lasted or whether there were any Eritrean casualties, but did say the skirmish was contained and that skirmishes occur on a regular basis between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

¶3. (C) COMMENTS: While the ESF has previously claimed attacks in south-central Eritrea, this is not an ethnic Afar region and the supposed participation by Afar militants of the RSADO strikes us as odd. Previous reports of RSADO attacks centered on Eritrea's south-eastern panhandle, a traditional Afar area. RSADO has seemingly exaggerated its success in the past, claiming in 2009 that it implausibly killed 250 Eritrean troops in one incident, no word of which reached Asmara. The armed wings of both the RSADO and ESF are based in Ethiopia and reportedly receive support from Ethiopian authorities. That the Eritrean government publicly

reported this alleged clash is also somewhat unusual, being the first border skirmish since February 2008 acknowledged via Ministry of Information channels. The rebels (and their Ethiopian patrons) perhaps felt emboldened by the December UN sanctions, while it is likely the Isaias regime chose to publicize the firefight to underscore its claim that Eritrea remains under constant threat from external foes.

McMullen